



The Canadian Association of Eighteenth Century Studies and the Canadian Historical Association

Chaussegros de Léry's Map of Montréal, 1726 (Wikimedia Commons)

The Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (CSECS) and the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) share the common mandate of bringing together Canadian historical scholarship and pursuing academic and professional activities for the benefit of their members. The CHA has among its membership Canadian intellectual historians who have made major contributions to the study of the 18th century. Indeed, the list of former CHA prize winners includes scholars whose publications focus on the 18th century. There is a wide range of research interests among these scholars. Although many consider themselves members of the Canadian scholarly community, others have found more fruitful collaboration with historians of the 18th century working in Europe and South America. While the CHA is broadly devoted to fostering the scholarly study and communication of history in Canada, the CSECS has a more temporally specific and interdisciplinary mandate.

The CSECS was founded in 1971 as a bilingual, interdisciplinary organization, bringing together Canadian scholarship on the long eighteenth century across the Humanities disciplines and in both official languages. In recent years, literary studies have tended to dominate the conference. From the beginning, there have always been sessions on historical subjects, and the conference theme has tended to be broadly historical, ranging from “Spectacle in the 18th Century” (Saskatoon, 2001), to “1759: Making and Unmaking Empires” (Ottawa, 2009), and to “Revolutions in Eighteenth-Century Sociability,” the subject of the 2014 meeting in Montreal.

Intellectual history and the history of ideas have been particularly well-represented in CSECS meetings, both in the individual panels and in the plenary speakers. In recent years, we have had literary scholars including Martine Watson Brownley (Emory), and Marie-Laure Girou-Swidorski (Ottawa) speak on subjects of such general scholarly interest as political biography and the circulation of ideas among the women of the *ancien régime*. Other meetings have featured historians. In the 2012 meeting in Edmonton, David Bell (Princeton) critiqued the idea of a “global turn” in analyses of violence in the French Revolution, while at Ottawa, in 2009, conference-goers had the choice of hearing Fred Anderson (University of Colorado, Boulder) speak about the international significance of the year 1759 or Alain Beaulieu (UQAM) discuss the impact of the Seven Years’ War on Canada’s First Nations. A year later, in St. John’s, Jean-François Palomino, of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, continued this focus on Quebec in the eighteenth century with a plenary lecture on mapping New France.

The talks by Palomino and Beaulieu also highlight two other aspects of CSECS that have become increasingly important over the last decade or so: an attention to book history and a focus on eighteenth-century Canada that incorporates both colonial and First Nations cultures. Our conferences always include some sort of eighteenth-century themed special event or outing.

The Ottawa conference built around 1759 and the Seven Years’ War of course included a significant component of material on cross-cultural issues in the Canadian eighteenth century and, in doing so, it followed on the 2003 Vancouver meeting, “Indigenes and Exoticism.” Yet even when the conference themes don’t relate quite as directly to Canadian subjects, there are invariably panels on North American literature, history, and society.

Another way that CSECS has sought to maintain its interdisciplinarity is by hosting joint meetings with other societies. Over the past few years, we have met with several regional American eighteenth-century societies as well as with the Aphra Behn Society (in Hamilton in 2011), a meeting that incorporated a significant amount of work on women’s intellectual contributions to eighteenth-century culture. This coming year in Montreal, we will be meeting with the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society, whom we also met with in Toronto in 2000.

This overlap also emphasizes CSECS interest in exploring all aspects of eighteenth-century culture. Our conferences tend to be relatively small – usually hovering around a hundred and fifty participants, give or take a couple of dozen – and while our membership is primarily Canadian or Canadian-based, in the last few years we have been delighted to welcome increasing numbers of American, European, and Asian scholars. Our goal is to provide a venue for discussion of contemporary work being done in the long eighteenth-century and to do so as inclusively as possible. Whether that means a panel on major new editions of canonical literary figures such as Frances Burney or Samuel Richardson, an examination of the philosophical reception of David Hume, a study of the visual representations of David Garrick in the fine arts and the popular press, a reading of de Toqueville’s commentary on the Seven Years’ War, or a discussion of botanical collectors in Newfoundland in the 1820s, there is a place for it at our meetings. The deadline for proposals for Montreal in 2014 is 1 April, and we warmly encourage anybody who is interested to visit the website at <http://www.scedhs2014.uqam.ca>